

## Introduction

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## **Introduction: Remembering Dictatorship: State Socialist Pasts in Post-Socialist Presents**

**Sara Jones and Debbie Pinfold**

Anniversaries are tricky things. The year 2014 marks twenty-five years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and what for many is seen as the end of state socialist rule in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, this date holds different meanings for different post-socialist states: where Hungary saw a negotiated transition from socialist to market economic structures, in Romania, 1989 was marked by violent revolution and the dramatic execution of the dictator. In the Baltic States, 1989 is perhaps less significant than 1991 – the year which saw the end of Soviet rule and independence for Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Even before this watershed, the experience of state socialism itself was equally diverse, with the ‘Goulash communism’ of Hungary and the brutal Ceauşescu regime once again occupying opposite ends of the spectrum. Within individual nations, the memories associated with this part of twentieth-century European history vary dramatically: accounts of extensive surveillance and state repression clash with sometimes nostalgic reflections on the security (particularly economic security) that the socialist system provided. Moreover, twenty-five years on, an entire generation has grown up with no direct experience of dictatorship and only mediated memories of this period.

This diversity calls into question the very endeavour we are embarking on in this special issue. Can we really speak of remembering state socialism? Would this

not require some agreed upon definition of what state socialism was or might be? It is here that the plurals of our subtitle becomes important – there were many state socialist pasts, just as there are many post-socialist presents, not only across, but also within different countries. For a full understanding of what is happening in the region in terms of history, culture, memory and politics, recognition of this diversity is essential. Yet we would like to argue that we can, nonetheless, still speak of ‘remembering dictatorship’, that is, that an analysis of these diverse contexts can reveal similarities in the processes of remembering, working through, or even coming to terms with dictatorial rule. In the following, we would like to explore further some of these similarities through the interdisciplinary lens of memory studies and suggest ways in which the essays presented here might be useful for understanding how collective memories of authoritarian regimes are produced, mediated and circulated in the democratic cultures of the present. One quarter of a century after the fall of the Berlin Wall would seem a particularly provident point to engage in this endeavour. We are at a moment in history when post-socialist populations still include individuals who experienced the early (and often more brutal) years of dictatorship, those who were born into the socialist system and whose formative years were in the (in some contexts) more liberal and prosperous 1970s and 1980s, and the new generation who have access to this past through mediated memories alone. At a political level, many Eastern European countries are endeavouring to negotiate their place in the enlarged European Union, including both adapting to and transforming existing EU memory practices.<sup>1</sup> This places us at a point of transition between the communicative memories of those with direct experience of state socialism and the cultural and

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<sup>1</sup> See David Clarke’s contribution to this special issue.

political memories that will determine how it is collectively remembered in the future. Thus it is now that we can observe how this transition is negotiated and the role of different actors in this process.

Aleida Assmann has divided memory into four formats: individual, social, cultural and political.<sup>2</sup> This introductory essay will be structured loosely around these four formats, but will take into consideration in particular how the different modes of memory interact. As Arnold-de-Simine and Radstone argue, ‘although Assmann’s terminology is useful for formulating research questions, these differentiations and classifications can at best function as heuristic tools’. In particular, we must not allow these heuristic distinctions to cloud analysis of ‘how the political and the psychical, the public and the private, and the individuals and society interact with and inform each other in processes of remembering’.<sup>3</sup> A further critique of Assmann’s typology is that it bypasses consideration of the specific role of media in representations of the past, or, where the medium is incorporated into the analysis, there is a tendency to view it as purely a storage technology, rather than an active component in shaping

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<sup>2</sup> Aleida Assmann, 'Four Formats of Memory: From Individual to Collective Constructions of the Past' in *Cultural Memory and Historical Consciousness in the German-Speaking World Since 1500*, ed. by Christian Emden and David Midgley (Oxford, 2004), pp. 19-37 and Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich, 2006), p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Silke Arnold-de-Simine and Susannah Radstone, 'The GDR and the Memory Debate', in, *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities*, ed. by Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinfold (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 19-33 (pp. 25-26).

what is and can be remembered.<sup>4</sup> Bearing these potential objections in mind, we have modified and added to Assmann's typology and will consider: individual remembering in collective context; community remembering; mediation of memory; narratives of memory; and political memory.

### **Individual Remembering in a Collective Context**

Individual memory for Assmann is the personal, neuronal memory that each of us has of our past experiences and which shapes our relationships and identity. This form of memory – as all forms of memory – does not record the past exactly; rather it is deceptive, subjective and changeable.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, individual memories 'do not exist in isolation, but are *networked* with the memories of others' and it is in their ability to overlap and connect within a particular group that they have the potential to be community-building.<sup>6</sup> Here Assmann draws on the seminal work of Maurice Halbwachs, who argued as early as the 1920s that the individual neither acquires nor recalls his or her memories in isolation, but rather in society. Halbwachs contended that to remember we turn outward, rather than inward; memories are 'recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them'. This is the basis for Halbwachs's social frames of memory, the

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<sup>4</sup> See José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford, 2007), p. 14; Franziska Sick and Beate Ochsner, 'Einleitung', in *Medium und Gedächtnis: Von der Überbietung der Grenze(n)*, ed. by Franziska Sick and Beate Ochsner (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), pp. 7-29 (p. 13); Martin Zierold, *Gesellschaftliche Erinnerung: Eine medienkulturwissenschaftliche Perspektive* (Berlin, 2006), p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Assmann, *Der lange Schatten*, pp. 23-26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24. Italics in original; all translations from German are our own.

collective frameworks, which are, in his words, ‘precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society’.<sup>7</sup>

Individual memories are thus reliant on and shaped by communication with others and yet they remain individual and particular. Moreover, collective memory can only exist through individual appropriation of common symbols, narratives and structures. Here Olick’s observation of ‘an unresolved tension between individualist and collectivist strains running through Halbwachs’s work’ can be of use.<sup>8</sup> Olick argues that collective memory appears to have two distinct meanings: ‘socially framed individual memories and collective commemorative representations and mnemonic traces’. He suggests a division of the term into ‘collected memory’, and ‘collective memory’. Collected memory is ‘the aggregated individual memories of members of a group’, shaped by (and also shaping) the social frameworks in which they remember. In this form, the individual is the centre of analysis and ‘shared symbols and deep structures are only real insofar as individuals [...] treat them as such’. Approaches based on collective memory, in contrast, assert that ‘ideas, styles, genres, and discourses [...] are more than the aggregations of individual subjectivities’ and that ‘groups provide the definitions, as well as the divisions, by which particular events are subjectively defined as consequential’.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and tr. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London, 1992), pp. 38, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, ‘Collective Memory: The Two Cultures’, in *Sociological Theory* 17 (1999), 333-48 (p. 334).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 336, 338, 342, 341.

So how does this relate to our context? We can see that individual memory, based on personal experience, plays an essential role in publicly performed memories of state socialism. It is in a complex interaction between particular experiences in the past and the present political and social context that individual memories are produced and narrated: that is, memories of life under state socialism are refracted through present circumstances. Following Olick, we can understand this as collected memory. And yet it might also be argued that within a given social context there are a limited number of discursive strategies available to individuals and these narrative structures are provided by the wider mnemonic community: the tendency to classify the rememberer in an often undifferentiated way as ‘victim’, ‘secret police informant’, ‘Securist’, ‘communist functionary’, ‘nostalgic’ is evidence for this point. In order to be intelligible and received as authentic, accounts about the past cannot deviate too far from expected patterns and may even have to follow culturally-determined ‘schematic narrative templates’ in a process that Wertsch describes as ‘deep collective memory’.<sup>10</sup> As Wertsch and Roediger outline with reference to the work of MacIntyre, the remembering individual is the active agent, ‘and every use of these [narrative] tools is unique [...], but this performance is viewed as harnessing items in [...] society’s “stock of stories”’.<sup>11</sup>

Jeremy Morris’s contribution to this special issue highlights further the ways in which individual memories can interact with the collective in post-socialist space. For the Russian workers who are the subject of Morris’s ethnographic study, the end of

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<sup>10</sup> James V. Wertsch, ‘Collective Memory’, in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. by Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (Cambridge, 2009), pp.117-37 (p. 130).

<sup>11</sup> James V. Wertsch and Henry L. Roediger III, ‘Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches’, in *Memory* 16 (2008), 318-26 (p. 324).

state socialism functions as a demarcation line separating past from present. Just as present experiences are framed by reference to the past, so memories of the past are refracted by experiences of a decline in economic and social status in the post-socialist period. Morris demonstrates that while these memories and experiences are individual – attached to a named informant – they are also communal, in the sense that they are shared by and within a specific (classed) group and serve to reinforce the bonds between these individuals. Moreover, the ‘mnemonic resources’ that Morris’s informants draw on in their narrations of the past go beyond autobiographical memory to include shared cultural values that are presented by these individuals as being an essential part of their group identity that spans the divide of 1991.

In this process, material objects – be it cacti or fridges – are invested with mnemonic power, coming to represent a link between socialism and post-socialism. We might view these objects as a particular kind of ‘personal cultural memory’. Van Dijck uses this term to describe those ‘shoe box’ items (for example, diaries, photographs, and home videos) that we create and collect to remind us of significant life events. These objects are personal, rather than public; yet they are structured by cultural conventions and social frameworks.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the items considered in van Dijck’s model, the objects ascribed mnemonic significance by Morris’s informants were not created as products of remembering; nonetheless, they come to function as triggers for communal narratives that connect past and present, as well as individual and social remembering. Here we can draw parallels between this use of

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<sup>12</sup> José van Dijck, ‘Mediated Memories: Personal Cultural Memory as Object of Cultural Analysis’, in *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 18 (2004), 261-77; José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories*.



mnemonic resources in post-Soviet space, and the surge in interest in the material culture of state socialism, in particular in eastern Germany, where objects from the former GDR have been resurrected as both products of consumption and museum artefacts.<sup>13</sup>

### **Community Remembering**

Morris's study also points towards the importance of generations in the process of constructing memory. The younger generation's experiences of both socialism and post-socialism are quite different from those of the parents; nonetheless, through intergenerational remembering, the narratives of the older generation do have an impact on the ways in which the children understand their lives, as they compare present circumstances to their parents' descriptions of life in the Soviet Union. This reflects Assmann's definition of the second form of memory: social memory.

Building on Karl Mannheim's concept of generations as based on the similar formative historical experiences of individuals of approximately the same age, Assmann argues that different generations have different values, identities and,

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<sup>13</sup> There is a vast amount of critical literature on East German material culture, dealing with both its return as product of consumption and its role in museums of everyday life. See for example Jonathan Bach, "'The Taste Remains': Consumption, (N)ostalgia, and the Production of East Germany', in *Public Culture* 14 (2002), 545-56; Silke Arnold-de Simine, "'The Spirit of an Epoch Is Not Just Reflected in Pictures and Books, but Also in Pots and Frying Pans': GDR Museums and Memories of Everyday Life', in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, ed. by Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce (Rochester, 2011), pp. 95-111.

therefore, memories, which coexist and conflict with one another in a given society.<sup>14</sup>

Morris's study demonstrates the ways in which each generation's understanding of the past and its relationship to the present is refracted by the narratives and experiences of both older and younger members of their social group.

Nonetheless, Assmann's model tends to suggest a homogenous society, in which the formative historical experiences of individuals of approximately the same age are similar enough to constitute group identity. Is this in fact always, or even usually, the case, particularly in the post-socialist context, in which historical experiences varied so significantly according to nationality, class and social position? While certain phenomena suggest that the concept of generations might be a useful heuristic tool – for example, the wave of more or less controversial texts published by the 'Zonenkinder' of eastern Germany<sup>15</sup> – focusing exclusively on this aspect may

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<sup>14</sup> Assmann, 'Four Formats', pp. 23-24 and Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>15</sup> This phenomenon has attracted considerable scholarly attention: see for example Owen Evans, "'Denn wir sind anders": "Zonenkinder" in the Federal Republic', in *German as a foreign language*, 2 (2005), 20-33; Susanne Ledanff, 'Neue Formen der "Ostalgie" – Abschied von der Ostalgie?' Erinnerungen an Kindheit und Jugend in der DDR und an die Geschichtsjahre 1989/90', in *seminar* 43 (2007), 176-93; Bernd Lindner, 'Biographien aus einem verschwundenen Land: Die Jugendgenerationen der DDR in literarischen Selbstbildern', in *BIOS: Zeitschrift für Biografieforschung, Oral History und Lebenslaufanalysen*, 16 (2003), 190-205. Those born in the former GDR between 1975 and 1985 are also beginning to make their voices heard in the public sphere through the umbrella organisation *Dritte Generation Ostdeutschland*, founded around the time of the twentieth anniversary of reunification in 2010. See [http://www.dritte-generation-ost.de/3te\\_generation/index.html](http://www.dritte-generation-ost.de/3te_generation/index.html) (accessed 27 March 2014).

risk overlooking the importance of other types of mnemonic community. Some of the memory battles of post-socialism are indeed fought across generational lines, notably concern that the younger generation are ignorant of the suffering of their parents and grandparents and overly influenced by nostalgic media representations of state socialism.<sup>16</sup> However, in the Eastern European context, the battle lines would appear to be more frequently drawn not between generations, but between groups that define themselves in relation to their particular experience of the past: victim organisations conflict with groups of former state security officers, memories of ‘normal life’ clash with accounts that emphasise repression and total control.<sup>17</sup>

This point is highlighted particularly well by Vieda Skultans’s contribution to this special issue. In the Baltic States, as Skultans demonstrates, it is not generation, but ethnicity that plays the central role in cementing group values and identity in relation to the past and in particular with regard to the Nazi and Soviet occupations (including contestation that this is even the right term). Skultans demonstrates that remembrance of World War II and its aftermath is divided along ethnic lines, with narratives of victory and liberation on the part of ethnic Russians challenging memories of oppression under Soviet rule on the part of ethnic Estonians, Latvians or

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<sup>16</sup> This, for example, was the response to the survey by Schroeder and Deutz-Schroeder, which indicated that young Germans, particularly from the eastern states, had limited historical knowledge of the Cold War and were reluctant to characterise the GDR as a dictatorship. See Monika Deutz-Schroeder and Klaus Schroeder, *Oh, wie schön ist die DDR: Kommentare und Materialien zu den Ergebnissen einer Studie* (Schwalbach, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of how victim groups might define themselves linguistically on this basis, see: Sara Jones, ‘Catching Fleeting Memories: Victims Forums as Mediated Remembering Communities’, in *Memory Studies* 6 (2013), 390-403.

Lithuanians. It is in particular the difficulty of remembering those who were conscripted to fight on the side of the Nazis, and who may have viewed their engagement as a defence of the nation against Soviet aggressors, that causes conflict between these different mnemonic communities. Significantly, Skultans indicates that these divisions resist generational change, as young people with no direct memory of the contested events continue to participate in the memory wars of the present.

Analysis of these memory wars points towards elements of Aleida Assmann's cultural and political forms of memory. Memory of past injustices in the Baltic States is kept alive not only by trans-generational remembering of the kind seen also in Morris's piece, but also by cultural memory in the form of monuments and memorials, and by political memory in the form of commemorations, supported to varying extents by state institutions. However, as Skultans demonstrates, these 'commemorations continue to feed upon living, albeit contrasting memories' and are inextricably linked to them. Where this link is broken – for example, at Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square – the monument may serve as a *lieu de mémoire* in Nora's understanding, that is, as a memory site to which the imagined community of the nation attaches itself.<sup>18</sup> However, these monuments no longer serve as triggers for memory contests, such as those seen in the Baltic States and across the former Eastern Bloc. In this regard, it is important to view memory as an act or practice, rather than purely an object or artefact. Following Sturken, 'a practice of memory is an activity that engages with, produces, reproduces and invests meaning in memories, whether

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<sup>18</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', in *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-24.

personal, cultural or collective'.<sup>19</sup> We might, in this sense, speak of 'collective remembering' rather than 'collective memory', and 'remembering communities', rather than 'memory communities'. The use of the active verb highlights the importance of 'mediated *action*' in collective constructions of the past<sup>20</sup> and places emphasis on 'the social and political contestation' that plays a central role in these practices.<sup>21</sup>

### **Mediation of Memory**

The dynamic nature of remembering should also be taken into account when we consider Aleida Assmann's next form of memory: cultural memory. Here Aleida Assmann builds on the distinction drawn by Jan Assmann between the living 'communicative' memory of the recent past, exchanged within and between up to three generations (usually in oral form), and cultural memory, which refers to the distant past, is fixed in cultural artefacts (for example, canonic texts, dance, ritual, songs, monuments), is institutionally secured and has a normative or formative function for the community.<sup>22</sup> Consideration of the role of the medium in

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<sup>19</sup> Marita Sturken, 'Memory, Consumerism and Media: Reflections on the Emergence of the Field' in *Memory Studies*, 1 (2008), 73-78 (p. 74).

<sup>20</sup> Wertsch, 'Collective Memory', p. 119.

<sup>21</sup> Wertsch and Roediger, 'Collective Memory', p. 319.

<sup>22</sup> Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 34-41. First published as: Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992). See also Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', in *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 125-33 and Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies: an*

communicative and cultural memory is not entirely absent from Aleida Assmann's development of this model. Indeed, she has turned her attention explicitly to the media of memory, noting that, 'each medium permits a specific access to cultural memory'.<sup>23</sup> However, her understanding of media – be it literature, film, archives, or memorials – seems to be primarily as storage technologies, conserving memory for its re-appropriation in the present. While Assmann acknowledges the role of 'carriers', her analysis of the dynamics of cultural memory is largely limited to a distinction between the 'active' and the 'archival', essentially the memories which are present in public discourse at any given time and those which are latent, awaiting reactivation.<sup>24</sup>

However, as Erll and Rigney point out 'there is no cultural memory prior to mediation' and the various media themselves, far from being 'merely passive and transparent conveyors of information [...] play an active role in shaping our understanding of the past'. In this context, Erll and Rigney develop a more dynamic understanding of cultural memory as an 'ongoing process of remembering and forgetting' in which 'individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past'.<sup>25</sup> This reconfiguring is the product of a complex process of mediation,

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*International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin, 2008), pp. 109-18.

<sup>23</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich, 1999), p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Assmann, 'Four Formats', p. 31-32 and Assmann, *Der lange Schatten*, pp. 55-58.

<sup>25</sup> Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, 'Introduction', in *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin, 2012), pp. 1-11 (p. 2-4).

‘remediation’<sup>26</sup> and premediation as different understandings of a shared past find expression in a range of media which interact in the public sphere. Such a dynamic understanding of media would seem particularly appropriate to an analysis of remembering in the ‘media-culture societies’<sup>27</sup> of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The post-socialist individual is immersed in a plethora of different media representations of the past – from literature and film to heritage and the new media.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, they have access to an equally broad range of media through which they can represent and transmit their own memories to a wider audience.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, as Erll argues, media do not function as ‘neutral carriers of information about the past’.<sup>30</sup> Rather each form will leave its particular ‘trace’<sup>31</sup> on the memories it produces.

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<sup>26</sup> See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> Siegfried J. Schmidt, ‘Medien: Die Koppelung von Kommunikation und Kognition’, in *Medien, Computer, Realität: Wirklichkeitsvorstellungen und Neue Medien*, ed. by Sybille Krämer (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), pp. 55-72 (p. 55).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> The new media in particular are often seen as part of a democratisation of memory in this regard. See Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading, ‘Introduction’, in *Save As...Digital Memories*, ed. by Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (Basingstoke, 2009), 1-21 (pp. 8-19); Jones, ‘Catching Fleeting Memories’.

<sup>30</sup> Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. by Sara B. Young (Basingstoke, 2011), p. 114.

<sup>31</sup> Sybille Krämer, ‘Das Medium als Spur und als Apparat’, in Krämer, *Medien, Computer, Realität: Wirklichkeitsvorstellungen und Neue Medien*, pp. 73-94.

The significance of mediation is highlighted by Matthew Philpotts's contribution. Philpotts analyses the complex of buildings at Prora on the Baltic Island of Rügen through the theoretical frameworks of heterotopia and palimpsest. This complex was initially designed as a Nazi 'Strength through Joy' ('Kraft durch Freude', KdF) site and in the 1980s served as accommodation for young GDR men who refused to serve in the National People's Army (NVA) and were therefore conscripted to work as builders instead. Such apparently authentic sites – concrete evidence of past societies and their institutions – might appear to offer the visitor direct, unmediated, access to the past. However, Philpotts points to the particular significance of and ambivalence inherent in a ruin, which can be read as a 'stark counterpoint to the grandiose ideological visions projected into the future by the socialist regimes' or, in its continued existence and valorisation, as something which allows for 'a nostalgic yearning for a lost past, whether individual or collective, personal or political'. The medium of the ruin is thus certainly not a 'transparent conveyor of information' in that its very physical presence shapes visitors' understanding of the past and their relationship to it in potentially quite specific ways.

Nonetheless, at the same time the ruin is not a prescriptive medium. In his discussion of the role of heritage as media, Silverstone argues that all museums, exhibitions and restorations, in common with other forms of mass communication media, are artefacts:

Their relationship to something called 'reality', to history, to the other, is a function of that work, human work, and they require the viewer or the visitor to read, to follow and to work with what they see, hear, read or walk through.



In this sense all our media are texts [...]. They all express more or less visibly the marks of their construction and their ideological inflection.<sup>32</sup>

If such sites can be read and interpreted as literary texts, it follows that the position of the recipient cannot be excluded. Indeed, Mason argues that one advantage of understanding heritage in terms of texts and narratives is ‘that it raises the question of unintentional meanings, omissions, or contradictions present within displays’.<sup>33</sup> Thus the ruin’s susceptibility to quite different readings renders it a potentially destabilising site. However, this plurality is anathema to a heritage industry which appears to take very seriously the singular of George Santayana’s dictum: ‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it’.<sup>34</sup> Philpotts uses Sarah Dillon’s distinction between ‘palimpsestic’ and ‘palimpsestuous’ readings of such spaces to demonstrate that those responsible for preserving and maintaining Prora have largely adopted the more simplistic ‘palimpsestic’ approach of separating out the different layers of the history and emphasising those which facilitated the creation of reassuring messages for the present, rather than allowing visitors to experience the destabilising potential of the ruin.

Nevertheless, while the overall approach to the site has been of this more controlling, simplifying variety, Philpotts also notes other more ‘palimpsestuous’

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<sup>32</sup> Roger Silverstone, ‘Heritage as Media: Some Implications for Research’, in *Heritage Interpretation, vol. 2: The Visitor Experience*, ed. by David L. Uzzell (London, 1989), pp. 138-48 (p. 141).

<sup>33</sup> Rhiannon Mason, ‘Cultural Theory and Museum Studies’, in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. by Sharon Macdonald (Oxford, 2006), pp. 17-32 (p. 27).

<sup>34</sup> George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (London, 1905), vol. 1, p. 284.

approaches which resist top-down academic narratives and put greater responsibility for interpretation in the hands of the visitors. Such attempts help to challenge the neat, reassuring binaries that underlie the widespread general representation of dictatorship, and perhaps enable the visitor to come to a more nuanced understanding of both the past and her or his relationship to it. These contrasting approaches at Prora indicate that the 'trace' the medium leaves on memory is not only determined by the nature of the medium itself, but also by those individuals that Ashuri and Pinchevski, in their analysis of witness testimony, describe as the 'mediators': understood in our context as the curators, directors, filmmakers and editors who create the artefacts of cultural memory.<sup>35</sup> This highlights once again the dynamic nature of cultural memory and the interaction between the social context (the narratives that are available and the meaning ascribed to them), the artefact and producers of culture, who play a central role in staging and structuring the past within the constraints of the particular media form. Moreover, while the mediator might suggest a dominant or hegemonic reading of the heritage 'text', in a further interplay between collective and individual memory, the recipient may respond with 'oppositional' or 'negotiated' interpretations.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Tamar Ashuri and Amit Pinchevski, 'Witnessing as a Field', in *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, ed. by Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 133-57 (p. 138).

<sup>36</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/decoding', in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (London, 1980), pp. 128-38. See also Ryan's interpretation of Hall for collective memory studies: Lorraine Ryan, 'Memory, Power and Resistance: The Anatomy of a Tripartite Relationship', in *Memory Studies*, 4 (2011), 154-69 (pp. 159-60).

## Narratives of Memory

In his analysis of ‘deep collective memory’, Wertsch draws in part on the seminal work of folklorist Vladimir Propp and his identification of ‘generalized “functions” that characterize an entire set of narratives, as opposed to the particular events and actors that occur in specific narratives’. Following Wertsch, these can be understood as ‘schematic narrative templates’, which ‘function to exert a conservative, yet often unrecognized force on collective memory’.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the sociologist Harald Welzer demonstrates the interaction of cultural, social and medial remembering. He shows that ‘the things that we consider to be the most personal essential elements of our autobiography need not necessarily be based on our own experiences; rather they have often been imported into our life story from other sources, for example from books, films and narratives’.<sup>38</sup> Welzer argues that alongside ‘direct imports from narrative segments and stories’ an even more significant impact of these cultural frames is the structuring effect of narrative: ‘in the process of “memory talk”, in the communal praxis of conversational memory, through every book read and every film seen, we have all learnt that a real story has a beginning, a middle and an end and that it should follow basic narrative patterns in order to be communicable’.<sup>39</sup>

The turn to literary theory in these anthropological and sociological accounts suggests that we might also view these narratives in terms of genre. In his influential *Metahistory*, Hayden White points towards the implicit literary genres (Romance,

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<sup>37</sup> Wertsch, ‘Collective Memory’, p. 129, 130.

<sup>38</sup> Harald Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis: Eine Theorie der Erinnerung* (Munich, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183-84.

Tragedy, Comedy and Satire) invoked in the emplotment of the historical ‘chronicle’ and the implications of the chosen form for the representation of past structures and processes.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Erll highlights the importance of genre conventions for media analyses of collective remembering and notes that there are particular (transmedial) forms that are preferred for the encoding of the past.<sup>41</sup> The genre conventions linked to these forms are likely to have an impact on both the production and reception of the memories they construct. As Erll and Nünning point out, ‘literary genres and their formal characteristics are closely related to conventionalized expectations’ and these expectations guide our reading experience: when reading a detective novel the reader familiar with the conventions of the genre expects to learn the solution to the case at the end.<sup>42</sup> Like media then, (literary) genres are no mere transparent vessels for information, but structure the reader’s understanding.

However, as we have seen in the discussion of Prora, this does not mean that there is only one way of reading a literary (or any other) narrative and literature in particular is characterised by the potential for multiple and potentially destabilising interpretations. Indeed, Aleida Assmann’s conception of cultural memory privileges the literary text as a medium which ‘translates and transcends the other memory formats’ by ‘disconnect[ing] them from individuals, groups and institutions that were

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<sup>40</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1973), esp. pp. 7-11.

<sup>41</sup> Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 123.

<sup>42</sup> Ansgar Nünning and Astrid Erll, ‘Concepts and Methods for the Study of Literature and / as Cultural Memory’, in *Literature and Memory: Theoretical Paradigms, Genres, Functions*, ed. by Ansgar Nünning, Marion Gymnich and Roy Sommer (Tübingen, 2006), p. 17.

once its carriers and reconnect[ing] them with an open community of readers'.<sup>43</sup> In her analysis, physical sites and monuments tend to support political memory which is 'emplotted in a narrative that is emotionally charged and conveys a clear and invigorating message';<sup>44</sup> fiction, on the other hand, allows for greater complexity and ambiguity than physical sites. We might challenge this view of heritage as a medium constituted exclusively of singular narratives; however, it seems correct to assert that literary texts in particular allow for multiple voices and perspectives and a degree of human understanding for and even empathy with characters whose views we may find offensive. As Birgit Neumann argues, in offering multi-perspective narratives, texts can design a 'panorama of co-existing collective memories', through which both 'shared interpretations of the past, but also incompatible memories of the shared collective past become visible'.<sup>45</sup>

Petra James's contribution to this volume suggests that such reading experiences may have the potential to challenge well-established cultural paradigms. She considers recent trends in both historiography and in fiction by Czech, Slovak and Polish writers to suggest that recent historians' emphasis on 'bottom up' history derives to some extent from adopting literary techniques which allow history to be represented from the perspective of the 'ordinary man'. Fiction allows us to focus on individuals with whom we potentially empathise rather than the broad movements and statistics of academic history, with possibly surprising results. Such fictions also have

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<sup>43</sup> Assmann, 'Four Formats', p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>45</sup> Birgit Neumann, 'The Literary Representation of Memory', in Erll and Nünning, *Cultural Memory Studies: an international and interdisciplinary handbook*, pp. 333-43 (p. 339).

the potential to challenge the all-pervasive simplistic binaries that characterise representations of dictatorship, for example when the erstwhile victim's determination on vengeance causes him to become a perpetrator, as is the case in two of the texts James analyses. In reading a *story* they do not or cannot know, readers are encouraged to experience even familiar history as if for the first time, sometimes in an almost visceral, immersive manner as they empathise or even identify with even ostensibly unsympathetic characters, and this process can challenge established individual modes of thinking and even cultural paradigms. Drawing on Renate Lachmann's discussion of literature as culture's memory, James's essay suggests the role literature might play not only in addressing previously taboo topics and creating a new language of mourning, such that the texts become *lieux de mémoire*, but also in constructing a new and more inclusive history of twentieth-century Europe, one that makes use of Eastern sources in order to challenge and complement a Western narrative of the Holocaust whose primary symbol is Auschwitz. This parallels similar movements at the political level, as discussed in David Clarke's article in this special issue; however, literature is seen to offer something more than the political rhetoric on display in, for example, Latvian or Hungarian attempts to renegotiate hegemonic understandings of European history.

At the same time however, the potential of literature to offer new perspectives on familiar or unfamiliar pasts may find itself in conflict with the powerful influence of more rigid schematic narrative templates. Conventional narratological wisdom would suggest that the first-person narrative facilitates a closer engagement or even empathy with the narrator and an understanding of complex emotions and motivations. However, such empathy was strikingly absent from many contemporary reviews of one of the most controversial first person narratives of life under state

socialism – Christa Wolf’s *Was bleibt* (1990). Many contemporary reviewers did not appear to appreciate the complexity of, in Tate’s terms, Wolf’s ‘evolving autobiographical project’, the elusive conception of the self and the rigorous self-examination Wolf’s text demonstrated.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, one of the foremost hostile critics, Ulrich Greiner, quite deliberately and explicitly set aside such narrative subtleties,<sup>47</sup> apparently only able or indeed determined to conceive of the text in accordance with the simple binary of victim / perpetrator that so often structures the production and reception of post-socialist narratives. The recourse to these simple binaries seems to militate against Aleida Assmann’s belief in the superiority of the literary text as a transmitter of cultural memory<sup>48</sup> and points once again towards the importance of viewing potential (cultural) memory triggers within the socio-political context into which they are launched. After all, the ‘open community of readers’ that Aleida Assmann suggests as crucial to the creation of cultural memory might be supposed to imply open minded as well as large and disparate, with each individual reader engaging individually and in his or her own distinctive manner with the text.<sup>49</sup>

However, John Heath’s discussion of the debates sparked by the posthumous outing of Romanian writer Oskar Pastior as an informer to the Securitate in 2010 suggests that the ‘openness’ of that community might well have another dimension,

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<sup>46</sup> Dennis Tate, *Shifting Perspectives: East German Autobiographical Narratives Before and After the End of the GDR* (Rochester NY, 2007), pp. 194-235.

<sup>47</sup> Ulrich Greiner, ‘Mangel an Feingefühl’, in *Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf: Der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland*, ed. by Thomas Anz (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), pp. 67-68.

<sup>48</sup> Assmann, ‘Four Formats’, p. 36.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

namely chronological. This can be understood as a result of shifting discourses about specific pasts within democratic memory cultures. By considering the debate about Pastior in the light of the public furore around Wolf's *Was bleibt* and the subsequent revelations that she had acted as an informant, Heath demonstrates that the German example clearly influenced the treatment of its later Romanian counterpart – something we might understand in terms of premediation.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, debates about how to read contentious sources have become more nuanced and there is greater empathy and differentiation in the treatment of the Romanian writer. If Wolf had functioned as a conveniently early catalyst for coming to terms with a whole political, social and literary system, Pastior's case was dealt with much more upon his own personal terms and his work continued to be treated on its own merits. This may suggest that in the fullness of time, even more contentious literary texts about life under dictatorship will be read as the complex, possibly even contradictory literary constructs that they are, rather than being subsumed under the simple victim/perpetrator binaries that currently 'authenticate' them in the eyes of the reading public. It might be hoped that a more nuanced and complex understanding of the socialist past and our own relationship to it will emerge as a result.

### **Political Memory**

It is in this potential for plurality that cultural memory differs from the final form of memory to be discussed in this essay: 'political memory'. Aleida Assmann describes this form as the only mode of memory that can be described as "collective", in a narrower sense'. Political memory produces 'strong bonds of loyalty' and a 'strong

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<sup>50</sup> Erll and Rigney, 'Introduction', p. 8.



unifying we-identity'. National memory is, for Assmann, a form of 'official' or 'political' memory.<sup>51</sup> She cites Ernest Renan as one of the earliest writers to recognise the significance of common historical experience for the construction of the nation.<sup>52</sup> The concept that communities, including national communities, are social constructions and based to a large extent on shared pasts also informs Hobsbawm and Ranger's work on 'the invention of tradition' and Anderson's discussion of 'imagined communities'.<sup>53</sup> The Marxist basis of Hobsbawm and Ranger's analysis leads them to conceive of this in terms of ideology and hegemony: the identification of the constructed or 'invented' nature of traditions is seen to be a way of ensuring that their 'spell would be broken and automatically dissolved'.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, as Assmann notes, the highlighting of the 'false' nature of certain representations of the past, reaffirms by contrast the possibility of an 'authentic' or 'true' portrayal.<sup>55</sup> However, as we have seen, subjectivity, narrative and emplotment are key features of all representations of the past, including those that make up official or political memory. The question to be asked of elite appropriations of the past is not, therefore, if they are

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<sup>51</sup> Assmann, *Der lange Schatten*, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp. 37-39.

<sup>53</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983); Erich Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 2005 [1983]).

<sup>54</sup> Aleida Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory', in *Social Research* 75 (2008): 49-72 (p. 66).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

‘true’ or ‘false’, but why they resonate (or not) with the wider population and the political consequences of their use.<sup>56</sup>

These questions often form the starting point for political science and historical approaches to ‘collective memory’, that is, examination of state-level efforts to construct a particular version of the past that supports and binds citizens to a specific national identity. Several analyses have tracked efforts to (re)form political identity in the newly independent states of Central and Eastern Europe. Such efforts often involve the creation of new historical narratives that exclude communism from understandings of the national self.<sup>57</sup> Some of the complexities of this process can be seen in Geoffrey Pridham’s exploration of the role of historical legacies in post-socialist politics. Pridham demonstrates that historical legacies can both hinder and help democratic consolidation. In part, this relates to political structures, which must either be removed in the transition from authoritarian to liberal democratic governance, or which may serve as pre-socialist historical models in the reconfiguration of state-society relations. However, Pridham indicates that political values and attitudes might also be viewed as a legacy and can be equally significant in ‘negative consolidation’, that is, the ‘final removal of the prospects for non-democratic system alternatives’.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>57</sup> For example: Péter Apor, ‘Eurocommunism: Commemorating Communism in Contemporary Eastern Europe’, in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. by Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (New York and Oxford, 2010), pp. 233-46; James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven and London, 2010).

It is here that we see the interaction of memory politics with social or even individual remembering. Overcoming the past in this sense can mean changing the political attitudes of a population not used to democratic structures and conditioned by memories of dictatorial rule. In this way, the political sphere comes into contact with the seemingly private memories expressed by, for example, Morris's informants. Nostalgia for state socialism is sometimes viewed as a symptomatic of the persistence of authoritarian attitudes, not only amongst the former elite, but also amongst 'ordinary' voters. Where it is considered politically expedient to transform public attitudes towards the past in this regard (notably, not in Putin's Russia), this frequently involves a direct confrontation with the crimes committed under the dictatorship through transitional justice, lustration or truth commissions.<sup>58</sup> However, as Pridham shows, perhaps paradoxically, it is this confrontation with the past and the contestation that it necessarily entails that can prolong the influence of the authoritarian past on present political decision-making, as historical memory is 'used for political or partisan advantage', particularly in conflicts between former regime parties and the political right.

The latter point is demonstrated clearly in David Clarke's analysis of three nation-specific memory battles set within the broader European context. Clarke shows

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example: Carmen González-Enríquez, 'De-communicization and Political Justice in Central and Eastern Europe', in *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies*, ed. by Alexandra Barahona de Brito, Carmen González-Enríquez and Paloma Aguilar (Oxford, 2001), pp. 218-47; Monika Nalepa, *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge, 2010); Lavinia Stan (ed.) *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past* (London, 2009).

that in the Baltic States, Hungary and Germany, the state socialist past continues to have significant influence in the politics of the present. Interestingly, in all three of these contexts, we see an interplay between the cultural and the political, as it is memorial media – monuments, films, museums – that appear to trigger debates at the political level, in which elite actors construct particular understandings of the national self. And yet the building of the House of Terror and Holocaust Memorial, or the filming of the *Soviet Story* can be viewed as acts of political memory designed to display a particular national image both internally and externally. Indeed, it is the positioning of national memory disputes within the wider European context that forms the core of Clarke's analysis. The Baltic States' attempt to co-opt the European Union in their memory wars with Russia through appeal to a shared 'anti-totalitarianism' may be similar in rhetoric to Fidesz's anti-communism in Hungary; however, it emerges from quite different motivations based on domestic conflicts and results in a quite different representation of the EU. In contrast, in Germany, the appeal to an 'anti-totalitarian consensus' at home is not matched by strong support for the efforts of Central and Eastern European countries to give the victims of the Gulag the same central position in European memory as the victims of the Holocaust.

### **Levels of Memory**

Clarke's contribution calls into question the very project of creating a unified European memory, which a number of scholars have advocated in recent years.<sup>59</sup> The

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<sup>59</sup> See Aleida Assmann, 'Europe: A Community of Memory?', *GHI Bulletin*, 40 (2007), pp. 11-25; Aleida Assmann, *Auf dem Weg zu einer europäischen Gedächtniskultur* (Vienna, 2012); Claus Leggewie, 'Seven Circles of European

participation in or lobbying for European memory projects, such as the Prague Declaration of 2008 or the Warsaw Declaration of 2011, might not reflect a desire to unite Europe through shared history, but to further domestic (memory) political concerns. It would seem then that national, 'official', memory is the primary motor of memory wars at the political level. And yet, as demonstrated by Skultans's exploration of commemorations in the Baltic States, the political cannot be separated from social or cultural forms of remembering. The memory battles of the political elites are both driven by and resonate with the memories exchanged within specific communities, which, in turn, are in part constituted by the perception of a shared past. As Barahona de Brito argues, 'people do not act only according to strategic calculations, but in light of the memories and narratives they have adopted and that make sense to them as members of a particular "memory group"'.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Pridham suggests that it is attitudes formed by such deeply rooted community remembering which are the most difficult to overcome in the process of negative consolidation.

Memory mediated in cultural artefacts is also seen to play a key role in the memory battles at the political and social level: monuments, museums, films and literature are both the products of and triggers for debates that sometimes reach a surprising level of ferocity. Moreover, deeply-rooted narrative forms and genre

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Memory', in *Eurozine*, 20 December 2010; Claus Leggewie, *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung: Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (Munich, 2011); Jan-Werner Müller, 'Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory', in *Memory & Power in Post-War Europe*, ed. by Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 1-35 (pp. 10-11).

<sup>60</sup> Alexandra Barahona de Brito, 'Transitional Justice and Memory: Exploring Perspectives', in *South European Society and Politics* 15 (2010), 359-76 (p. 362).

conventions structure remembering at individual, social and political level.

Nonetheless, as argued above, it is perhaps the potential of culture, and particularly fiction, to present new worlds and perspectives and to elicit empathy with the ‘other’, which might permit a better understanding of the plurality of historical experience and promote reconciliation. Finally, each of these forms of memory is unthinkable without the individual, who produces, appropriates and remakes narratives about the past and who participates at each level of remembering. As Olick argues, “‘memory’ occurs in public and in private, at the tops of societies and at the bottoms, as reminiscence and as commemoration, as personal testimonial and as national narrative’.”<sup>61</sup> Taken together, the essays collected in this special issue demonstrate the ways in which these different kinds of memory are mutually constitutive and suggests that memory studies must truly work in trans- or interdisciplinary collaboration, if they are to do justice to the complex ways in which individuals and groups remember authoritarian pasts in the democratic media-culture societies of the present.

### **Note on contributors**

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<sup>61</sup> Olick, ‘Collective Memory’, p. 346.

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